

SEPTEMBER 8, 1976

HANOI AND THE MISSING AMERICANS

ANNCR: EARLIER THIS WEEK, NORTH VIETNAM MADE PUBLIC THE NAMES OF TWELVE AMERICAN PILOTS MISSING IN THE VIETNAM WAR. VOA NEWS ANALYST RONALD J. DUNLAVEY DISCUSSES THE REACTION IN WASHINGTON: VOICE:

ONE OF THE MOST SENSITIVE PUBLIC ISSUES IN THE UNITED STATES IS THE FATE OF AMERICANS WHO DISAPPEARED DURING THE VIETNAM WAR. THE DEFENSE DEPARTMENT LISTS SEVEN HUNDRED AND EIGHTY-NINE AMERICANS AS MISSING IN ACTION IN ALL OF SOUTHEAST ASIA, WITH ABOUT FIVE HUNDRED AND TWENTY-FIVE OF THEM MISSING IN VIETNAM. ACTING ON THE ASSUMPTION THAT THE VIETNAMESE MUST KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO ALL OR MOST OF THESE PERSONS, WASHINGTON HAS PERSISTENTLY URGED HANOI TO RELEASE THE INFORMATION---BUT WITHOUT ANY SUCCESS. AND THAT FAILURE TO COOPERATE IN THIS MATTER HAS BEEN ONE OF THE BIGGEST OBSTACLES TO POSSIBLE NORMALIZATION OF RELATIONS BETWEEN HANOI AND WASHINGTON.

NOW, THE VIETNAMESE HAVE SUDDENLY RELEASED THE NAMES OF TWELVE MISSING AMERICAN PILOTS, TOGETHER WITH A STATEMENT EXPRESSING HOPE THAT THE UNITED STATES WILL "TAKE CONCRETE ACTION TO SETTLE POSTWAR PROBLEMS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES." SOME OBSERVERS TOOK THIS TO MEAN THAT HANOI WOULD LIKE TO HAVE UNITED STATES COOPERATION BOTH IN POSTWAR ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND IN THE VIETNAMESE EFFORT TO OBTAIN MEMBERSHIP IN THE UNITED NATIONS. THEY RECALLED THAT SECRETARY OF STATE KISSINGER REMARKED RECENTLY THAT THE UNITED STATES ATTITUDE ON VIETNAMESE MEMBERSHIP AT THE FORTHCOMING SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS WOULD DEPEND ON HANOI'S WILLINGNESS TO HELP IN DETERMINING THE FATE OF THE MISSING AMERICANS.

THE FIRST OFFICIAL AMERICAN REACTION CAME FROM THE STATE DEPARTMENT, WHICH CALLED HANOI'S ACTION "A POSITIVE STEP" BUT POINTED OUT THAT THE NAMES PROVIDED WERE ONLY A SMALL PERCENTAGE OF THOSE ACTUALLY MISSING---AND CALLED FOR A FULLER ACCOUNTING. THEN PRESIDENT FORD ADDRESSED HIMSELF TO THE SUBJECT. HE SAID TUESDAY THAT HE WELCOMED THE VIETNAMESE ACTION. BUT, HE ADDED, "NONE OF US CAN BE SATISFIED BY THIS LIMITED ACTION BY THE VIETNAMESE....THEY STILL HAVE INFORMATION ON HUNDREDS MORE." MR. FORD SPOKE OF THE ANXIETY OF RELATIVES OF THE MISSING MEN, AND CALLED IT "CALLOUS AND CRUEL TO EXPLOIT HUMAN SUFFERING IN THE HOPE OF DIPLOMATIC ADVANTAGE." "THE VIETNAMESE," HE INSISTED, "HAVE AN OBLIGATION TO PROVIDE A FULL ACCOUNTING OF ALL AMERICANS MISSING IN ACTION." UNTIL THEY DO SO, HE ADDED, "NORMALIZATION OF RELATIONS CANNOT TAKE PLACE."

THE PRESIDENT'S STATEMENT REFLECTS THE PUBLIC REACTION HERE TO THE VIETNAMESE ACTION. EVEN THIS LIMITED ACTION IS WELCOME, BUT IT IS FAR FROM SATISFYING EITHER OFFICIAL OR PUBLIC CONCERN. AS ONE NEWSPAPER EDITORIAL PUT IT, VIETNAM HAS PULLED ASIDE ITS CURTAIN OF SECRECY ABOUT THE MISSING AMERICANS---BUT NOT FAR ENOUGH.